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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000042

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SUBJECT: FADHILA MEMBER CRITICIZES MALIKI FOR BASRAH OPERATION

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CLASSIFIED BY: Howell H. Howard, Director, U.S. Regional Embassy Office, Basrah, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

**¶1.** (C//REL USA, MCFI) SUMMARY: Basrah Provincial Council (PC) member and Fadhila insider, Sheikh Khazl Jaloob Falih al-Saidi (aka Abu Salam), criticized Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's Charge of the Knights (CoK) as a political move to eliminate the Jaysh al-Mahdi so that the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) could do better in future elections. He also claimed that Maliki obtained Kurdish support for the operation by striking an oil-related deal. Abu Salam tried to distance Fadhila's guilt by association with JAM, but admitted that there are ties. He was elusive as to Fadhila rejoining Maliki's governing coalition and urged U.S. intervention to avoid repeating the problems of the last provincial election. End Summary.

"CHARGE OF THE KNIGHTS WAS POLITICAL"

**¶2.** (C//REL USA, MCFI) Abu Salam met REO poloff on April 22. He was thankful that Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's Charge of the Knights (CoK) was helping to restore Basrah's peace. However, he claimed it was politically motivated to improve the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq's (ISCI) future electoral chances. As evidence, he said that operations were directed against the Sadrist; ISCI/Badr/Dawa- affiliated Army and Police officers were being promoted; technical directors were being switched out for ISCI and Dawa members; and the central government was violating the Constitution by sidelining the Governor and PC in running Basrah's affairs. He also claimed that Maliki obtained Kurdish support for CoK provided the PM would temporarily ignore oil contracts the GOI considers illegal in Kurdistan and push for passage of the hydrocarbons law.

WE'RE NOT SADRISTS, BUT WE KNOW SOME

**¶3.** (C//REL USA, MCFI) Abu Salam eagerly downplayed rumors that Fadhila militamen fought alongside the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) during CoK. He said that Fadhila suffered such accusations only because the two shared religious ties to the same Marjaiyah. In fact, he claimed that JAM once raided Fadhila's HQ, killing one person, injuring two and kidnapping ten. In the same breath, however, he called GOI operations focused against JAM alone "unfair." He admitted having links to Sadrist and was pleasantly surprised when Poloff clarified the U.S. position,

saying that the U.S. is not opposed to the Sadr movement but to harmful activities against Iraqis and the Coalition and that Sadr energies were best channeled through the political process.

#### DIVISION BETWEEN FADHILLA AND UIA

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¶4. (C//REL USA, MCFI) In response to our question of whether Fadhila would rejoin Maliki's United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), Abu Salam was elusive. He said that Fadhila needed to be treated like an equal partner in the UIA. When the UIA asked Fadhila to rejoin, he claimed Fadhila asked for a couple of ministries, but was denied. He also said that Fadhila had earned Tehran's anger for leaving the UIA and claimed that foreigners did not support Fadhila.

#### ELECTIONS

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¶5. (C//REL USA, MCFI) Looking towards future elections, Abu Salam predicted that the perceived favoritism of CoK towards ISCI would increase the competition among the political parties and ultimately, turn violent closer to the elections. He urged the U.S. to fix the problems of previous elections: voter fraud committed by polling station workers, party pressure on electoral officers and lack of neutral observers. He also supported an open list system to give rural candidates a better chance at representation and to prevent religious clerics from choosing which candidates served. What Basrah needed, he opined, was a PC full of technocrats.

#### COMMENT

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¶6. (C//REL USA, MCFI) Abu Salam's complaints against CoK are sour grapes given his admitted ties to the Sadrists. He is reportedly one of Fadhila's most influential members, dangerous, religious and possibly tied to Iran. According to some, he may represent a factional split in Fadhila competing against

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Governor Mohammed Wa'eli. He was distressed we raised such rumors, claimed Fadhila was united, but said that he and the Governor disagreed on some religious matters. That said, Abu Salam is a close friend of Wa'eli's brother, Ismael, who runs Fadhila's militia, which may explain why Abu Salam is considered to be dangerous. End Comment.

HHOWARD